

## Sūrah Jumu‘ah

### Central Theme and relationship with the Preceding *Sūrah*

There is no basic difference between the central theme of Sūrah Şaff and Sūrah Jumu‘ah. Only the style and arguments of both are different. The previous *sūrah* mentions the prediction of Jesus (sws) about Muḥammad (sws). This *sūrah* alludes to the prayer of Abraham (sws); the Ishmaelites are warned to duly honour the favour He has blessed them with by sending Muḥammad (sws) to them and to not deprive themselves of this great blessing by being misled by the conspiracies of the Jews. In this regard, a group from among the Muslims is rebuked for not showing respect to the Friday prayer and to the Prophet (sws) because of a worldly business need. If the greed of trade and business is dearer to people than showing reverence to the Friday prayer and to the sermon delivered on it by the Prophet, then this only means that they have not understood the deal of sale and purchase they have struck with their Lord, as is mentioned in the previous *sūrah*. At the same time, they are warned of the fate of their behaviour of disregard and disrespect: the Jews had adopted this very behaviour and as a result were deprived of the *sharī‘ah* of God; if Muslims want to succeed, they should refrain from following in their footsteps.

### Analysis of the Discourse

**Verses (1-4):** The Ishmaelites are reminded that the Prophet (sws) God had sent towards them is the result of the prayer of their great ancestor, the Prophet Abraham (sws). This is a great favour the Almighty has done them to liberate them from the darkness of the age of ignorance. Hence, they should try to value and honour this favour and not become a prey to the malicious conspiracies of the Jews.

**Verses (5-8):** A refutation of the claim of the Jews that they are the chosen ummah and no one except them can be blessed with the favour of prophethood. A reference is made to their unworthy attitudes which had deprived them of the Almighty’s guidance and also stripped them of the position of leadership they had held.

**Verses (9-11):** A group of Muslims have been rebuked on a wrong attitude they had adopted when once the Prophet (sws) was delivering the Friday address. Apparently, this might appear as a minor fault to them, but it points to a profound weakness in them: a group among them

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had not understood the basic reality that once a person enters the fold of Islam, he barter his life and wealth for the Almighty's forgiveness and mercy. It is against the requisites of his faith that business and trade activities should make him indifferent to Allah and His Prophet (sws). This is like following the footsteps of the Jews – something which had been forbidden in the previous *sūrah*. The Jews had erred similarly in the matter of *sabt* and the Almighty as result had severely cursed them for this attitude.

### Text and Translation

#### Section I (Verses 1 - 8)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ الْمَلِكِ الْقُدُّوسِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ (١) هُوَ الَّذِي  
بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ  
وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (٢) وَآخَرِينَ مِنْهُمْ لَمَّا يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ  
الْحَكِيمُ (٣) ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ (٤) مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ  
حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا بِئْسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا  
بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ (٥) قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ هَادُوا إِنْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ  
أَوْلِيَاءُ لِلَّهِ مِنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٦) وَلَا يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا  
قَدَّمْتَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ (٧) قُلْ إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ الَّذِي تَفِرُّونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ  
مُلَاقِيكُمْ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٨)

All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, the Sovereign Lord, the Flawless, the Almighty, the Wise. It is He who sent forth among the unlettered a Messenger from among them who recites to them His revelations and purifies them and instructs them in the Book and in wisdom; and, indeed, these people were in manifest error before this and from those among them also who have yet to be included among them. God is the Mighty, the Wise One. Such is the grace of God: He bestows it on who He intends to and great is His grace. (1-4)

The parable of those who were entrusted with the burden of the Torah and then did not bear it is like that of a donkey laden with books. What an evil parable is this of a people who denied God's revelations. And God does not guide the wrongdoers. Tell them: "O People who have

become Jews! If you think that you are dearer to God than others, then you should wish for death, if you are truthful in your claim.” And they will never be desirous of death because of the misdeeds they have done. And God knows well the wrongdoers. Tell them: “The death from which you are running away is sure to come to you. Then you shall be made to appear before Him who knows the unknown and the manifest. Thus, He will inform you of all what you had been doing.” (5-8)

### Explanation

يُسَبِّحُ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ الْمَلِكِ الْقُدُّوسِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ (١)

This introductory verse also occurs in previous *sūrahs* with slight change in words. In the previous *sūrah*, the past tense سَبَّحَ was used. Here the word يُسَبِّحُ is used which brings the portrayal before the eyes.

The verse mentions four attributes of God; all these attributes come as a preamble to the succeeding verse. It will be appropriate to explain them under the coming verse.

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٢)

A reflection on this verse shows that in order to realize the attributes of God mentioned in the opening verse the Messenger mentioned in this verse was sent forth.

God is the real sovereign. It is a requisite of this attribute that in order to inform His creation of His directives, He send forth to them a Messenger who recites before them His teachings and guidelines (يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ).

He is pure and flawless, and for this reason He wanted to purify people through His Messenger and His teachings. Thus His Messenger is purifying the beliefs and deeds of people and is cleansing them of moral evils (يُزَكِّيهِمْ).

Moreover, He is powerful and wise (الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ), and thus has sent a messenger who instructs people in *al-kitāb* (الْكِتَابُ) and *al-hikmah* (الْحِكْمَةُ). The word *al-kitāb* here means the *sharī'ah* or the divine law. The *sharī'ah* can only be enforced by someone who is powerful and has authority. However, God is not merely powerful and dominant. He is

1. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God, the Sovereign Lord, the Flawless, the Almighty, the Wise.

2. It is He who sent forth among the Gentiles a Messenger from among them who recites to them His revelations and purifies them and instructs them in the Book and in wisdom; and, indeed, these people were in manifest error before this.

also الحَكِيم (the wise). Thus the law He is instructing His people with through His Messenger does not merely manifest through force and authority; it also reflects His wisdom and the welfare and well-being of His people not only in this world but also in the next.

This verse actually recounts and expresses a divine favour to the Ishmaelites, and for this reason the attribute “unlettered” is mentioned for them as a distinctive feature. I have already elaborated upon this word earlier in this *tafsīr*; however, this much should remain evident as a reminder that though this term was actually coined specifically by the Jews among the People of the Book which reflected their religious arrogance as well as derision for the people of Arabia, yet since the Ishmaelites were not conversant with divine law, they themselves adopted this term as a title without any inferiority complex. Then when the Qur'ān used this word as a distinction for them and for the Messenger God sent forth to them, it was elevated to such a lofty status that it became a symbol of divinely ordained respect for them. As a result, a grand phenomenon was witnessed from providence: they who were derided and disparaged were entrusted with the responsibility of instructing and guiding the whole world, and they who felt pride in being the recipient of a divine book and *sharī'ah* were compared to a donkey that is laden with books (كَمَثَلِ الْإِمْارِ يَحْمِلُ أَثْقَارًا).

Here this word has been used to induce the people of Arabia to express gratitude: they should be thankful to their Lord that He has been bounteous to them. For their own reformation and instruction and to educate them in law and wisdom, He sent forth among them a person from among themselves, and took them out of the darkness of the age of ignorance in which they had been hitherto engulfed because of their state of being unlettered. The implication is that they who have received this favour should value and honour it, and also try that others adopt this attitude as well. It should not be the case that they are deprived of it because of not honouring it, and in this way the objection of the envious is realized.

I have already explained in detail in Sūrah Baqarah the attributes of Muḥammad, the unlettered Prophet, mentioned in this verse. Readers are advise to look it up so that the misunderstandings which have been spread by the rejecters of Ḥadīth regarding the purpose of his advent are dispelled. Abraham (sws) had prayed to God to send forth a prophet among the Ishmaelites having exactly these attributes. This prayer is mentioned thus in Sūrah Baqarah:

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

وَيُرْكَبُهُمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (١٢٩:٢)

Lord! Send forth to them a messenger from amongst them who shall read out to them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the law and in wisdom, and shall purify them. You are indeed the Mighty, the Wise One. (2:129)

It is evident from this discussion that just as Muḥammad (sws) is a manifestation of the attributes of God, he is also a manifestation of the prayer of Abraham (sws) which he made to God regarding the Ismaelites. In other words, he is an amalgam of a variety of attributes. He is the realization of Jesus' prediction and the manifestation of Abraham's prayer. He is also a reflection of God's attributes and is also a human being from among the unlettered Arabs. He is no stranger or alien to them. Those who are belittling them cannot blame them that they received the light of guidance through them or through some other means; in fact, the Almighty has elevated them above all His creation and through them He has provided the radiance of guidance to the rest of the world.

Here it should remain clear that though the Prophet (sws) was sent to the *ummiyyīn* (the unlettered) of Arabia, his message is for all mankind. I have already discussed this aspect in detail at an appropriate place in this *tafsīr*. It is enough to remember this much here that the Prophet (sws) was assigned two types of prophethoods: one specific and the other general. The former related to the Ishmaelites and the obligations of this prophethood were brought a completion by the Prophet (sws) himself. The latter related to all mankind, and in order to carry out this responsibility, the Almighty blessed his followers with the status of witnesses to the truth. His followers have been entrusted to fulfill this obligation till the Day of Judgement. Since the *ummiyyīn* stood at the vanguard of witnesses to the truth, it would not be wrong to say that it was through them that the Almighty showed the light of guidance to all mankind.

The words وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ are meant to stir up feelings of gratitude in the *ummiyyīn*. They had been engulfed in darkness of ignorance since a long time. In other words, the implication of these words is that if they consider this pitch darkness that had embraced them from all sides, they will have some realization of the favour and blessing of God – how He brought them out from this desolate darkness and bestowed great honour on them.

وَأَخْرَيْنَ مِنْهُمْ لَمَّا يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ<sup>3</sup>

This verse is co-ordinated to the word *ummiyyīn* (أُمِّيَّينَ) of the previous verse. The implication is that there are people who are yet to join the *ummiyyīn* to whom the Prophet (sws) is sent. This is a reference to those Ishmaelites who had yet to accept Islam. It is evident from this that in the previous verse though the word *ummiyyīn* is used in the general sense, it referred to only those Ishmaelites who had already embraced faith. Consequently, the last part of the previous verse: “indeed, these people were in manifest error before this,” bears evidence to this inference.

Now, in this verse, those among the Ishmaelites who had yet to embrace faith are called in a very subtle and effective manner to do so. The word  *مِنْهُمْ*  (from among them) of this verse clearly indicates that among these *ummiyyīn* who are the recipient of this divine favour, there are others who are as yet averse to this call. Thus in a very subtle and tactful manner they are urged to accept faith and not remain deprived of it because it is for them that this favour has been sent and they are its foremost addressees.

Also concealed in the words *لَمَّا يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ* (yet to be included among them) are glad tidings that though at the moment these people have not joined the ranks of the believers, they soon will. In other words, these glad tidings of they accepting faith in the future are similar to the glad tidings in verse seven of Sūrah Mumtahinah – the *sūrah* preceding the previous one.

By the words *وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ* (God is the Mighty, the Wise One), God has referred to His practice and law which He adopts about providing the guidance of faith: if He wants, He can bless all mankind with guidance because He is Mighty; however, He is also wise; hence He blesses only those people with guidance who according to His wisdom are worthy of it. In Sūrah Dahr, this aspect is alluded to by the following words: *وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَالظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا* (And you will not wish until Allah wishes. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, wise. He admits into His mercy whomever He wishes. And for the wrongdoers, He has prepared a grievous punishment. (76:30-31))

ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ<sup>4</sup>

This is a reference to the great blessing the Almighty bestowed on the *ummiyyīn* and which has been referred to earlier. He chooses those

3. And from those among them also who have yet to be included among them. God is the Mighty, the Wise One.

4. Such is the grace of God: He bestows it on who He intends to and great is His grace.

people to be the recipients of His favour whom He desires, and no one can have monopoly over His favour; all His desires are based on wisdom. No one else can interfere in this regard. The implication is that if the Jews are jealous of this favour, then they should express this jealousy as much as they like; they will only harm their own selves and will not be able to harm anyone else. The Almighty has bestowed the *ummiyyīn* with something which belongs to Him, and not which belongs to someone else that they should express anger.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا بِئْسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ  
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ (٥)<sup>5</sup>

The arrogant claim of the Jews that only they can be the recipients of the *sharī'ah* and no other can rival them in this status is rebutted. Their example is that of a donkey who is carrying the burden of books but has no idea what is written in them.

The words حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا signify that no doubt at one time they were entrusted with the burden of the Torah; however, this too is a reality that they never bore its burden. The words كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ explain what is meant by not bearing this burden: they did not continue to profess faith in the teachings and directives of the Torah. They denied them practically. Obviously, as a result of this denial, they were deprived of the reward they could have obtained by following them. The only thing that they did carry was their burden and sin and they in fact became exemplars of the comparison mentioned in this verse.

The word حُمِّلُوا is very subtle. It means that the Torah in becoming whose recipients they feel pride today, was not accepted by them with zeal and enthusiasm in the earlier times when it had been given to them; its burden was in fact imposed on them by force. The details of forcibly burdening them with it have been mentioned in Sūrah Baqarah. The manner in which the Jews displayed their arrogance and obduracy in accepting each and every directive of the Torah, and how sorrowfully and touchingly Moses (sws) expressed his grief on this attitude of theirs is also referred, albeit in a passing manner, in verse five of Sūrah Saff.

The words بئسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ refer to the fact that it is not befitting for people who are such bad examples to regard themselves to

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5. The parable of those who were entrusted with the burden of the Torah and then did not bear it is like that of a donkey laden with books. What an evil parable is this of a people who denied God's revelations. And God does not guide the wrongdoers.

be the chosen and near ones of God, and think that in their presence the Almighty will not entrust His *sharī'ah* to someone else.

As explained earlier, the words كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ explain what is meant by the statement of the Qur'ān made earlier that the Jews did not bear the burden of the Torah: they denied its directives by not following them. They do claim that they are its recipients; but if they do not follow it in practice, how can they be regarded as its trustees?

The exact words وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ also occur in verse seven of Sūrah Şaff. They allude to the fact that they have been cursed and condemned by God because of their misdeeds, and, as mentioned in Sūrah Baqarah, their hearts have been sealed by Him. Thus they will not be guided anymore. They themselves have wronged their souls. The Almighty was never unjust to them. They denied the Torah bestowed upon them, and now in their conceited claim of being its custodians, they are denying the last Messenger of God; they arrogantly contend why would God send such a messenger in some other race when they were present. It is in response to this attitude that the Qur'ān says in this verse that God does not guide such wrong-doers. Such people continue to lose their way in this manner.

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ هَادُوا إِن زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ لِلَّهِ مِنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُا الْمَوْتَ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٦)

Another of the arrogant claims of the Jews is rebutted here: if they claim to be the dearest and nearest to God, then it is a requisite of being so that they have the enthusiasm and fervour of giving their lives for His cause. The lover is the most desirous of meeting his beloved. He does not evade what leads him to his beloved. However, as far as these Jews are concerned, no one can compete with them in their fear for death. Readers can take a look at the verses three and four of Sūrah Şaff in which this state of theirs is commented upon. In Sūrah Ḥashr, the cowardliness of the Banū Qurayzah and their allies is portrayed in the following words:

لَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ رَهْبَةً فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ لَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ جَمِيعًا إِلَّا فِي قُرَى مُحَصَّنَةٍ أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ جُدُرٍ بَأْسُهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ شَدِيدٌ تَحْسَبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ (٥٩: ١٣-١٤)

6. Tell them: "O People who have become Jews! If you think that you are dearer to God than others, then you should wish for death, if you are truthful in your claim."



They fear you more than they fear God. This is because they are devoid of understanding. They will never have the courage to fight against you in an open field except in fortified cities and from behind walls. Great is their enmity with each other; you think of them as united, yet their hearts are divided. This is because they lack reason. (59:13-14)

In Sūrah Baqarah, this subject is discussed thus in relatively more detail:

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَتْ لَكُمُ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوُا الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ وَلَنْ يَتَمَنَّوَهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ وَلَتَجِدَنَّهُمْ أٰخِرَ النَّاسِ عَلَىٰ حَيَاةٍ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ (٩٥-٩٤: ٢)

Tell them: “If all the blessings of the Hereafter found with God are only for you alone leaving all others aside, then be desirous of death if you are true in this claim of yours.” And they will never wish for death because of the misdeeds they have done and God is fully aware of these wrong-doers. And indeed, you will find them to be the greediest of all people for life – even more than the Idolaters. Each one of them would love to live a thousand years. (2:95-96)

Though the words *مِن دُونِ النَّاسِ* of the verse are general; here reference is particularly to the Ishmaelites. Because of the predictions of the Torah and because of racial jealousy, the Jews had specially enmity with them. The details of this enmity are fully discussed in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Baqarah. This enmity began very earlier on when at the advent of the Prophet (sws) they realized that danger was looming over their heads and because of its fear increased their hostility.

Although the Jews could have stubbornly replied on what the Qur’ān has ridiculed them about by saying that they did not fear death, yet a person is fully aware of his inner-self. They felt that the Qur’ān had caught hold of a sore issue, and so they sought refuge in silence. How could they have refuted something to which their past history had testified and to which their present too was bearing evidence.

وَلَا يَتَمَنَّوَنَّهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ (٧)

Mentioned in this verse is the reason of their cowardice; what has made them so fearful of death is their misdeeds: they have killed prophets of God, interpolated the Torah and have been dishonest in what

7. And they will never be desirous of death because of the misdeeds they have done. And God knows well the wrongdoers.

they have been entrusted by God; they are also guilty of wiping out all the signs they were actually responsible for highlighting before people. With what face will they now appear before the Almighty? Nevertheless they will have to go to Him one day, and He is fully aware of these wrong-doers. He will duly punish each one of them.

قُلْ إِنَّ الْمَوْتَ الَّذِي تَفِرُّونَ مِنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مُلَاقِيكُمْ ثُمَّ تُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ  
فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ <sup>8</sup>(٨)

The warning concealed in the words وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ above is fully revealed in this verse: if they want to run away from death, they should try doing so – but where can they run. It will overtake them one day and then they will be presented before the Almighty with all their misdeeds. Each and everything they do is in His knowledge; He knows what is apparent and what is hidden; He will divulge all their misdeeds to them and they will have to undergo the punishment of each and every crime they had committed.

## Section II (Verses 9 - 11)

In the succeeding verses, Muslims are rebuked on a fault committed by one of their groups on showing disrespect to the Friday prayer and the Prophet (sws). A trade caravan once entered Madīnah. When some people heard of this news, they left the mosque right at the time when the Prophet (sws) was delivering the Friday sermon and marched off towards it. Even though this act was perpetrated by some impolite elements, it shed light on some weaknesses of the whole Muslim community – weaknesses that needed to be reformed.

The first weakness that became evident from this incident was that many people were not fully cognizant of the great blessing of God which He bestowed on the unlettered Arabs by sending forth Prophet Muḥammad (sws) to them.

The second weakness that became clear from this incident was that many Muslims had not become fully conversant with the spirit of trading mentioned in verses ten to thirteen of Sūrah Ṣaff. As per this, people who had made a covenant of “to listen and to obey” with the Prophet (sws) had sold out their lives and wealth to God in return for His forgiveness

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8. Tell them: “The death from which you are running away is sure to come to you. Then you shall be made to appear before Him who knows the unknown and the manifest. Thus, He will inform you of all what you had been doing.”

and Paradise. It is not appropriate for them that they give so much importance to some other trading that they leave aside the Messenger of God delivering a sermon in the mosque and march off from him.

The third weakness that became apparent from this incident was that people had not fully realized the importance of Friday. This day is similar to what Saturday was to the Israelites. When they violated the sanctity of this day by showing greed for worldly pleasures, the Almighty cursed them for that and disfigured their faces. If Muslims, while following their footsteps violate the sanctity of Friday, there is no reason why they too will not have to face the wrath of God.

All these weaknesses were very grave and were actually instrumental in not giving due importance and value to the blessing God bestowed on the unlettered people of Arabia much to the chagrin of the Jews. This blessing is mentioned very emphatically in this *sūrah*, and for this reason those who were guilty of this attitude were rebuked on it.

Readers can now study the subsequent verses with this background in mind.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ  
ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (٩) فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا  
مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ (١٠) وَإِذَا رَأَوْا تِجَارَةً أَوْ لَهْوًا انفَضُّوا  
إِلَيْهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا قُلْ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهْوِ وَمِنَ التِّجَارَةِ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ (١١)

Believers! When the call for the prayer is sounded on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave aside your trading. This is best for you, if you but knew it. Then, when the prayer ends, disperse in the land and seek God's bounty and remember God a lot so that you may prosper. Yet no sooner do the people see some trading or merriment, they flock eagerly to it, leaving you standing all alone. Tell them: "That which God has in store is far better than any merriment or any trade. And God is the most magnanimous provider." (9-11)

### Explanation

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ  
ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (٩)

Though the address in this verse is general, it is directed at the people

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9. Believers! When the call for the prayer is sounded on Friday, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave aside your trading. This is best for you, if you but knew it.

who have been rebuked for a weakness in character. The benefit of a general address is that the people who are actually addressed do not feel humiliated; in fact, if they are upright, they regard this overlooking of the speaker as his graciousness, and benefit from this advice. If people are pin-pointedly rebuked, there is a chance that feelings of stubbornness and overblown self-esteem arise in them.

The words صَلَاةٍ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ in مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ (prayer) so that it becomes evident that the prayer under discussion here is specifically the Friday prayer. It is solely the prayer which distinguishes this day from the rest.

The call for the prayer (*ādhān*) mentioned here is obviously the one which is given before the Friday sermon. Narratives unanimously say that in the times of the Prophet (sws) and the first two caliphs, there was only one call for prayer which was given before the Friday sermon. The caliph 'Uthmān (rta) added one more call when in his times the population of Madīnah increased. This second call was given from his house in the market of Madīnah. So, even though this second call is an addition made by him, the whole of the *ummah* adopted it without any objection.

The word سَعَى does not always mean "run about". In fact, this word is primarily used to do something with fervour and enthusiasm while being vigilant. When a slave hurries to answer the call of his master, this act is also termed as سَعَى. This is precisely what is implied here in فَاسْعَوْا إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ: when the call for the prayer is sounded, people should hasten to God's remembrance and leave aside trading activities.

The expression ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ (remembering God) is a comprehensive term for both the prayer and the sermon. It is very obvious that the prayer is God's remembrance; the Qur'ān has called it so at various instances. As far as the sermon is concerned, it is, in fact, part of the Friday prayer. The Friday prayer is read in place of the *zuhr* prayer which has four *rak'āt*. On Friday, they are reduced to two, and the Friday sermon takes the place of the remaining two. This ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ (remembering God) is done by the prayer leader while addressing the audience. Thus it can encompass everything which relates to the well-being and benefit of the Muslims which are a need of the hour. There is no reason to confine this remembrance to some specific supplications.

The word الْبَيْع primarily means "to sell". However, in its general usage, it is used for both sale and purchase. Thus when people were asked to leave aside الْبَيْع only, which is something that is more cherished, leaving aside purchase was required even more. The purpose is to ask Muslims to leave aside every kind of worldly activity and hasten towards the prayer. الْبَيْع is only mentioned because the incident which became a trial

for the Muslims and on which they were warned related to trading and sale and purchase.

The implication of the sentence *دَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ* is that though this directive will apparently weigh down heavily on some of the Muslims and they will consider it to be a financial loss that they will accrue, yet as far as reality is concerned, it will earn them great blessings. Livelihood and sustenance are all in the hands of God. If to please Him, they bear some loss, they will only store a lot of reward for themselves in the everlasting life of the Hereafter, and it is possible that even in this world He creates circumstances in which they are compensated for this loss. The words *دَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ* urge the addressees to judge their benefit or loss not keeping in view the limited life-span of theirs in this world; they should also keep in mind the Hereafter. However, the Hereafter is something which can only be understood if someone really wants to understand it.

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ<sup>10</sup>(١٠)

The implication of this verse is that if for the pleasure of God, they are not able to abide by this restriction which is only till the Friday prayer, then it only means that they are lacking in faith. Here it needs to be kept in consideration that the Jews were bound to abide by the restrictions of *sabt* for the whole day. However, for the Muslim *ummah*, restrictions are only from the call of the prayer to the completion of the prayer. They are free to do whatever they like during the rest of the day just as they are for other days of the week.

The sentence informs Muslims that there is no restriction on them to struggle for their livelihood and for the sustenance of God. However, if in this struggle it is not merely the world that they are after and also want to gain the benefits of the next world, then they should remember God at every step. It is this remembrance which will save them from the deceptions and trials of Satan; if they show any slackness in this, Satan will entice them away to such an extent that they will lose the sense of what is lawful and what is not, and they will end up becoming the slaves to the lures of this world and the fuel of Hell shall, as a result, be their fate in the Hereafter.

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10. Then, when the prayer ends, disperse in the land and seek God's bounty and remember God a lot so that you may prosper.

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا تِجَارَةً أَوْ لَهْوًا انفَضُّوا إِلَيْهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا قُلْ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهْوِ وَمِنَ  
التَّجَارَةِ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ <sup>11</sup>

Here, at the end, the actual incident is mentioned which was the real cause of the teachings and warnings mentioned earlier. It is evident from some narratives that a trade caravan entered Madīnah right at the time of the Friday sermon. As per tradition, its arrival was heralded by drums; as a result, some people hastened towards it leaving the Prophet (sws) delivering the sermon. Such caravans had a lot of importance in those days. Important merchandise was sold and purchased through them, and for this reason, people would anxiously wait for them. So as soon as one of them arrived, people would try to outdo each other in purchasing things from them and in selling what they had for them. People who ran away from the Prophet (sws) in this situation were obviously not the ones who had been fully grounded in Islāmīc teachings; it is evident that they were also not fully aware of the importance of the Friday sermon; they thought that it was only the prayer that was important; they must have thought that they would return before the prayer would begin. However, their blemish afforded the opportunity of divine guidance being revealed for the *ummah* regarding Friday, the Friday prayer and the Prophet (sws) himself which had not been revealed earlier.

Though the direction of address of the verse is not specific, it is evident that the blemish it refers to emanated only from a few uncouth individuals. I have already referred to this earlier. The general style of the Qur'ān is that it does not rebuke people by pin-pointing them; it adopts a non-specific style in such admonitions so that every person can benefit from it, and no one in particular is humiliated.

The expression *وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا* points to one aspect of the gravity of the incident: the sermon was being delivered by the Prophet (sws) himself. The disrespect and disregard which is obvious in this act is very significant. The Jews had adopted precisely the same attitude with Moses (sws). As a result, the Almighty distorted their hearts, as is mentioned in Sūrah Şaff. For this reason, these people have been taken to task by the Qur'ān at the very first stage.

The verse *قُلْ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهْوِ وَمِنَ التَّجَارَةِ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ* asks Muslims to be seekers of the great reward the Almighty has; it is far better than the merriment and trade activity of this world. If they earn the

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11. Yet no sooner do the people see some trading or merriment, they flock eagerly to it, leaving you standing all alone. Tell them: "That which God has in store is far better than any merriment or any trade. And God is the most magnanimous provider."

pleasure of God and His Prophet (sws) by incurring the greatest of worldly losses, then they will attain an eternal kingdom in lieu of the meager possessions they have. On the other hand, if they earn all the treasures of this world by displeasing God and His Prophet (sws), then they should realize how long these riches will remain with them. Thus prudence demands that they should not run after the riches of this world, and instead seek what God has in store for them. He is the best of sustainers, and provides sustenance from places a person cannot even imagine, and this sustenance is pure and wholesome in every respect.

I have already explained at some place in this *tafsīr* the special linguistic styles found in the expressions: *وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ* and *لَعَلَّكُمْ تَفْلَحُونَ*.

### **Qur'ānic Guidance on the Friday Prayer , the Friday Sermon and the Status of Prophethood**

Although I have explained the important inferences made during the explanation of the verses, following are some more which are worthy of attention.

Firstly, the style of the directives given in this *sūrah* regarding the Friday prayer, the call for this prayer (*ādhān*) and its sermon as well as the blemish on which they have been admonished shows that all the directives regarding the Friday prayer had been given by God even though there is no mention of this prayer anywhere else in the Qur'ān. It is evident from various narratives that this prayer was instituted in Madīnah by the Prophet (sws), and it was he who gave people the details of its rites and rituals. When people showed negligence in following these rites and rituals, they were admonished on this behaviour by the Qur'ān as if they had violated the directives directly revealed by God in this regard. It is evident from this discussion that directives given by the Prophet (sws) are in fact given by God whether they are mentioned in the Qur'ān or not. It is essential that the ascription of these directives be sound to the Prophet (sws); once this ascription is verified, then rejecting them is like rejecting the directives of God.

Secondly, the Friday sermon is an important constituent of the Friday prayer. It is not permissible for any Muslim to show negligence and disregard to it. As indicated earlier, it is only because of this sermon that the *rak'āt* of this prayer have been reduced from four to two. The sermon has actually taken the place of the two reduced *rak'āt* and is divided into two parts just like the two *rak'āt*. Moreover, the Qur'ān has called it *dhikrullāh* (remembering of God) just as this term has been used for the prayer itself. In other words, the spirit of the sermon and the prayer is the

same. The only difference is that in the prayer both the *imām* and his followers remember God while facing Him, and in the sermon it is the *imām* who faces the people and reminds them of remembering God. It is strange that in these times the real Friday sermon has been confined to a few conventional supplications, and the *imāms* spend all their energies in the long speeches they deliver before the actual sermon. The speeches have little to do with remembering God and are generally replete with other irrelevant details. It is a real pity that the audience either dozes off or gets tired because of their unending duration.

Many people in order to evade these lengthy speeches come to the mosque at the time when the real sermon starts which in these times has become more of a routine. This is indeed a sorry state of affairs. It is essential that the importance of the real sermon be revived. The way to do this is that the *imāms* instead of indulging in long speeches should spend time in reminding people of things that constitute the real sermon. This sermon should be brief yet full of wisdom so that people show interest in it and benefit from it. People should be urged to come to hear this sermon at the right time, and should be informed of the fate mentioned in this *sūrah* that they could meet if they show negligence to this.

Thirdly, it is evident from the style of the Qur'ān that in the eyes of God the most desirable attitude for a Muslim is that the time before the Friday prayer should be spent in its preparation. He should not get involved in any activity that hampers this preparation in any manner unless there is some severely compelling need. This inference is drawn from the words of the Qur'ān which say that once the Friday prayer ends, people should spread out in the land and seek God's bounty. It is evident from these words that the appropriate time for trade and business activities on this day is not before the Friday prayer but after it – specially for activities in which people have to come out of their settlements and disperse in the land, and there is a strong chance that if these activities are begun before the prayer, then they might interfere with it or hinder it. A person should be afforded with a day of the week in which he get a hair-cut, wash his clothes and takes a bath. The most appropriate day for this could only have been Friday because all these activities are part of its etiquette. For this reason, the Almighty has directed Muslims that if they have to indulge in trade and business activities on this day, then they should begin after the prayer. Our worthy scholars of the past have conformed to this very routine, and this routine is liked even today in religious circles where people have an awareness of Islamic traditions and customs.

I have confined myself in the discussion above to what can be deduced directly from the Qur'ān regarding the Friday prayer. There are other



issues regarding it which relate to *fiqh* that I have not touched upon.

With these lines, I come to the end of this *sūrah*'s *tafsīr* by God's help and guidance. فالحمد لله على إحسانه (gratitude to Him for His favour)

Lahore,

25<sup>th</sup> March 1978 AD

14<sup>th</sup> Rabī' al-Thānī 1398 AH

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